

Criteria for categorising Hawfinch breeding evidence in the UK

EBCC standard breeding categories	Specific interpretation for Hawfinch	Notes/rationale
Possible breeding		
1. Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitats.	<p>One or more birds seen in possible nesting habitat within the same general area between 15 April and 31 July, with no further indication of breeding.</p> <p>Favours a variety of wooded habitat, typically mature broadleaf and mixed woodland, large gardens, coppices, thickets, orchards and hedges. However, in Britain there are many such areas which lack Hawfinches.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Usually found in flocks in winter through to early spring. Ringing returns show that until late-April some birds at a site may be mobile and not confined to breeding sites, and may even be migrants, yet other birds may be starting to breed at this time. ● When breeding, Hawfinches are elusive and secretive, and prefer the cover of the high canopy, so once there are leaves on the trees they can easily be overlooked. ● Single birds or pairs recorded in suitable habitat, but on only one occasion, should be classed as Possible breeding in the absence of other evidence, and a count of each of these sites can be used to give a minimum number of Possible breeding pairs within a county. ● Eggs are laid from early April to late June, so records from suitable sites in the April to July period can give an indication of breeding presence.
2. Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Song is rarely heard so is infrequently recorded as evidence of breeding.
Probable breeding		
3. Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If a pair is seen together in the April to July period, without any other evidence (see below) it is recommended that Probable breeding is only logged if the pair is seen at the same site on more than one occasion.
4. Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song <i>etc.</i> on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place).	Male territorial display involves flying over woodland in a roller-coaster fashion, ending with a sudden plummet into the trees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is unusual to record Hawfinches advertising territory by singing against each other.
5. Courtship and display.	Adults are at their noisiest during courtship in April. Courtship feeding in which the female begs food from the male is a strong indicator of pair formation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Locating pairs in April is perhaps the best way of establishing territories and therefore the number of Probable breeding pairs.
6. Visiting probable nest site.	Nests are located in trees at heights of over 2m, sometimes up to 25m, on branches of trees within fairly open canopies, in the main leaders of young trees or within creepers, but nest sites are extremely variable.	
7. Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults.		
8. Brood patch on adult examined in the hand.		

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9. Nest building or excavating nest-hole.		
Confirmed breeding		
10. Distraction-display or injury-feigning.	Not applicable.	
11. Used nest or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey).		
12. Recently fledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species).	Recently fledged should be interpreted as full-sized young or juveniles which are still being fed by a parent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The most common evidence of Confirmed breeding for Hawfinch is the sighting of juveniles, often in the absence of adults in the vicinity. A judgement must be taken by the observer as to whether the young bird might have fledged locally. This might be based on the date of the observation, there being records of adults earlier in the season, and the habitat in the immediate area. ● Note however, that there are records of marked juveniles still being fed 3-4km from the nest where it hatched. ● There are also records of recently fledged birds (barely able to fly) found late in July and even in late August.
13. Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nests or nest-holes, the contents of which can not be seen) or adult seen incubating.		
14. Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young.	Adults carrying food or faecal sacs in May, June or July.	
15. Nest containing eggs.		
16. Nest with young seen or heard.		

Notes.

- Following recent declines, Hawfinches are now localised to relatively few areas of the country (see *BB 106: 549-550*). Local studies in these areas could concentrate on establishing the number of breeding pairs in defined areas, as well as identifying the number of 1-km squares in the area with breeding season records of Hawfinch. Even records from one date from other areas are especially valuable to help continue to define the range after that documented in *Bird Atlas 2007-11*.
- Most records of Hawfinches submitted to county recorders are of birds in the winter, when they are easier to see but also because of the tendency of the species to form flocks in traditional sites. It is not known how these flocks relate to presence of pairs in the breeding season, though it seems likely that the flocks disperse into surrounding woodland (but how far?) or they migrate to other parts of the country, or to the continent. BWP assumes that most birds are resident, so it is useful for county recorders to maintain counts of winter flocks; these are not required by RBBP but if supplied will be noted alongside any breeding evidence.
- One of the best ways to locate Hawfinches is by listening for their distinctive explosive, clicking call ('tzik'). Hawfinches are wary, so if disturbed they will immediately fly to cover in the canopy, so it is important to walk quietly through an area. Some pairs nest in loose colonies so be aware that there may be several birds in a small area when one bird is found.
- In view of the scarcity of this species in the breeding season, county bird recorders are encouraged to prompt their observers to submit records of this species in the breeding season according to the definitions here.
- Submissions to the Panel: numbers of pairs should be submitted according to the criteria detailed here. Details of all sites should be given; this provides a permanent record of Hawfinch breeding sites, which could be related to habitat features, and assists in the identification of duplicate records.